



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., signs MOU with Certiport, UVSC to give Navajo students second chance at diploma, technical training

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah – Navajo students who left high school before receiving their diplomas will soon have a second chance to complete school, receive certified computer training and learn the skills that can enable them to gain “digital literacy” and become self-sufficient.

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Certiport, an American Fork, Utah, computer training company, and Utah Valley State College to create a program to help students acquire their high school diplomas, become certified with computer skills and earn college credit.



“Once upon a time the Navajo Nation was very independent, very fierce and very proud,” President Shirley said. “That got taken away and we’re trying to get back to that. It’s all with it in mind to get our individual people, our families, back on their own feet so where they have a very good chance of making it on their own.”

Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr. said education is the bridge today to link people in rural areas to the markets of the world.

“It doesn’t seem to matter where you live, you can dream the big dream, think the big thoughts, and you can compete,” he said. “It’s all done on a common platform. But there must be a level of education that get our people to that level of performance and competitiveness, and I think this is certainly a step in that direction.”

Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Certiport, a computer training company, and Utah Valley State College to train Navajo students to become digitally literate, certified and self-sufficient. From left to right is David Saedi, president and chief executive officer of Certiport, Utah Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert and UVSC President Bill Sederburg.

Bottom, left to right is Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, Jr., and President Shirley at the Governor’s office at the Capitol in Salt Lake City.



Each year, some 20,000 Navajo students graduate from high schools. However, it is estimated that some 60 percent who enter school don’t finish. And of the 17,000 Navajo students who apply for scholarships, funding is available for only 6,000.

The "Skilled2Success" program is designed to help those who have left school learn a skill that will give them a technical livelihood no matter what Navajo community they are from or where they live.

"It's on behalf of our Navajo youth as well as our Navajo people who, for whatever reason didn't finish high school," President Shirley said. "This goes a long ways toward zeroing in on making education number one. With Certiport's help, with your help, Governor, I think we're well on the way."

Since 1999, the Navajo Nation has created one of the larger – if not the largest – wireless satellite networks in the world. Each of its 110 communities, called chapters, has free wireless service. Approximately five computers per chapter were provided through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In May 2006, the foundation presented the Navajo Nation with \$642,6000 to replace the older computers.

The computers and Internet access, along with training and software, has enabled residents to enter a world far beyond the territorial boundaries of the Navajo Nation, to participate in e-commerce, and to pursue their own interests in education, communication, research and entertainment.

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— President Shirley

The satellite-based connectivity is a broadband wireless private network that provides digital broadcast, video conferencing, e-mail and connectivity to chapters, schools, libraries and organizations around Navajoland.

In November 2005, the Navajo Nation joined the International Telecommunication Union and became a voting member of the Observatory for Cultural and Audiovisual Communication, a United Nations NGO. OCCAM, which is based in Milan, Italy, plans to open an office in the Navajo capital of Window Rock.

UVSC President Bill Sederburg said 548 Native American students attend the school and that 70 percent of them are Navajo. He said the school has recently seen increases in Native students, and is the largest producer of online classes in Utah.

"This is a partnership to build on what we already have," he said.

David Saedi, president and chief executive officer of Certiport, said the program will take the infrastructure that already exists on the Navajo Nation to the next level. With that, he said he hopes to see Navajo graduation rates improve and then hand the students off to UVSB to complete their degrees.

He said Certiport's standards have been adopted by 128 countries, and that the Navajo Nation has embraced a recognized global standard for its training.

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Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, Jr., Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Navajo First Lady Vikki Shirley meet for the first time at the Governor's office in Salt Lake City.